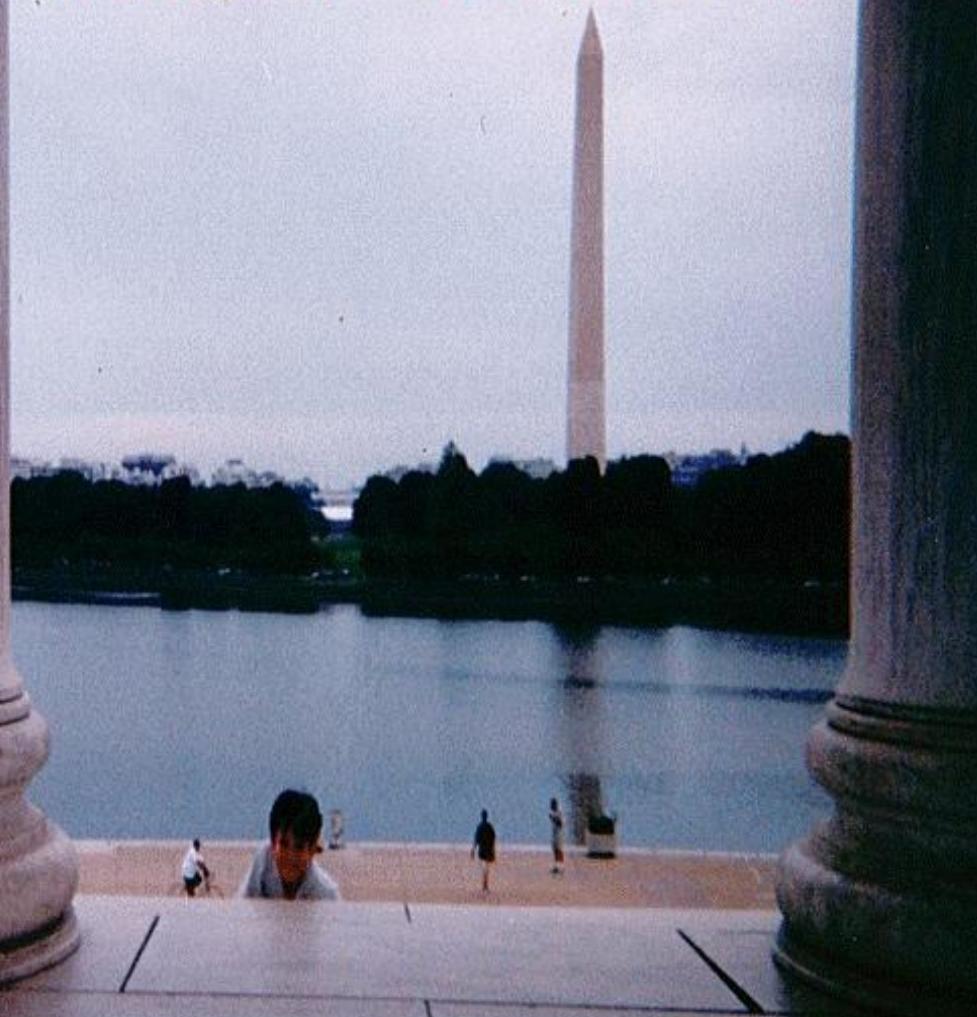


Lucian Filip

WANDERING



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AMERICAN NOTES
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For Sister Mary Rose Christy and Harry W. Morgan

*“ And I'm telling myself:
<What a wonderful world> ”*

Louis Armstrong

The Incognito

Going in the United States when you are a Romanian is like traveling incognito. Often, I felt that about myself because the very American is not confident about what he should think upon hearing the term “Romania”: the country where a famous gymnast was born, a bad president was killed, or a place, not necessarily Russia or Poland but, anyhow, nearby in East Europe. And that can give you a kind of relief, not having in your bags, every time, all the responsibilities which somebody would expect from a German or a Frenchman. A mistake would be to speak about Transylvania, more known than Romania: respectable American families would take you to their children for telling fairy tales about Dracula which has became more popular than Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. That could be an advantage for somebody eager to attract attention on him. In a country that has experienced almost everything, in such a short period of time, it is not useless to be interesting for a bored audience.

Which, usually rejects you with a polite smile and a remark like, “This is interesting!” When being successful and making jokes is almost a religion, the first, the most difficult and the most important step in a career is to shock your assistance and to make them laugh in the meantime. Corleone is the American Dracula, seasoned with pizza, pasta and bullets.

These are some reasons, why in my first

visit to U.S., in 1995, I lost my “virginity” in regard to speaking about Transylvania. Having had to deliver as a traveling journalist with a scholarship, a series of speeches, I’ve had the impression that being presented as brought from Transylvania, the most important thing about me has been done. What followed was, anyhow, useless, because the ”red label” was attached. It must have been my Transylvanian background, responsible for that mixture of fear and curiosity, which I was able to see on the faces of my host families from Saint Paul or Saint Cloud, when I had just landed at the airport or station.

The Moon

A journey in U.S. is not an ordinarily one. In my childhood, under communism, I’ve had friends speaking thrilled, late in the nights, about the “Promised Land”. I, still, remember their big eyes, when saying, a little scared “There you can have everything you like!”

From 1620 until now, a trip to America has never lost its religiosity. It doesn’t matter why you go there; more or less, you have something from a pilgrim. At least, for those who decide to go forever, this experience is done for an absolute change in their existence, something like a reborn or a baptism. They want to forget their tradition, history, past, sometimes their even memory; when you give up your memory you

want to abandon what you are. For an easterner, at least, America seems to be so far, that going there is the same with flying to the moon; something which must have been felt by the first pilgrims at Plymouth. On the moon, the chances to start an entirely new life, where you take with you only God, should be bigger than elsewhere.

In Dallas I attended a republican summit: “United We Stand America“ organized by Ross Perot and having guests like Newt Gingritch and Rev. Jassie Jackson. In the morning, I found in the front of the door of my room -like everybody from that hotel- a book: “To renew America“, by Newt Gingritch. In it, along with an anxiety about loosing American values that made this country what it is, subsisted an effort for renewing the spirit of the nation; like no other country, United States is periodically traversed by waves of prophetism, which, remarkable, are easier to be found in politics than in universities.

But, there is something, maybe, more important than books and electoral campaigns for the very dynamism of the system: the simple fact that the person who decides to go for ever there, is already new from the moment when has the ticket in pocket: he is going to the Moon! He is prepared for challenges, which he wouldn't accept in his native country.

The new baptism is done from the airport. That is if, the Internet all over the world will not export the Americanism.

The Smile

Just with a month before my trip in 1995, a plane from the same type -Airbus- and from the same airline -Romanian Airlines- that I had to take for U.S., crashed near Bucharest, at Balotesti. Even now, the causes of the accident are not quite clear. But than, having near my seat a man who was a cardiac and told me “Don’t you think, we should take care, one of each other?”, I didn’t feel comfortable at all. Over Atlantic, you cannot stop thinking that the route that Lindbergh had taken with a much smaller plane was almost the same. In Minnesota there are newspaper offices where you can see in a frame, an old yellow page from 1927, with a big title ‘Lindbergh does it!’ His magic smile, facing death, which is penetrating you from a paper, has become a symbol.

If there is a clear sky and you are not watching a film with Bruce Willis, defending The Federal Reserve Bank, at 28,000 feet altitude, the ocean seems to be a dainty lace. In those 12 hours of the journey, I was out of time only over the white standing silence of Greenland. Advertising for eternity. In such a moment, the crowded plane with families trying to keep their children on their places, the country music in headphones or Bruce escaping from a tunnel full of water, have all vanished.

Our first stop was not Chicago, but Shannon in Ireland. Where not only the fields

seen from the plane, have that intense green color but, also, their planes with white clubs flowers and the smiling eyes of the green dressed Irish stewardesses, looking at groups of Romanians, walking baffled through shops, obviously embarrassed by silence .We are a loudly nation and, often, I was thinking that this may express a feeling of insecurity coming from our mixed and very complicated balcanic background.

When over the Michigan Lake, while completing a sheet of paper in which you declare that you do not possess \$ 10,000 and agricultural products threatening the American economy, clouds scattering, suddenly you confront the very essence of the American town: the basaltic black and gray severe architecture of Chicago. O'Hare Airport is as extended as a Romanian medium town. So, after visualizing a huge picture of Mayor Daley wishing me "Welcome! ", I had to take a kind of small train, which overthrew me at the gate for Saint Paul, MN.

The Class

We were just a few in the plane, which belonged to the North -Western Airlines. I had never really understood the big difference between the first class and the other, despite a curtain. Why would somebody pay more money for that? As, with Americans passion in taking saloon cars....

I've told to myself that a country, which rejected from its beginnings establishment hierarchy, such as royalty and aristocracy, is making the difference with money. Mark Twain wrote maliciously about dukes and kings in "The adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Tocqueville, probable, the most quoted author on American political soil, considers the value of equality, together with liberty, as being the spiritual fundament of the system, which is regulating all the aspects of American life. Yet, somewhere, he makes the observation that in juridical procedures, the simple fact that somebody has the money to pay a bail, and somebody else doesn't, for the same offence, already induces in the spirit of the laws a gap between the members of society.

But the gap is much bigger than it seems to be. The "passion" of difference and inequality is as important as elsewhere, because it is a part of the human nature. The communism tried in my country for fifty years to destroy this feeling and it succeeded just in offering huge houses for those in charge to make everybody the same. In U.S. if equality is so vital, than the value of inequality should be as important and dynamic for the system.

Inequality is not so much emphasized, being "under cover" for not making people who don't belong to those "very successfully" to feel bad. And this hypocrisy is everything and finally, the only difference between equality and

inequality in U.S., when the nation doesn't accept ranks. But it reveals the reverence which the rich people is making to the poor people and the respect showed by the last to the rich, especially if the first did it on their on, working hard, as a "self made man". The term "self made man", as I try to understand it's psychological roots, is a kind of moral deal between rich and poor; in which the rich explains: "I am where I am, but I began like you, a waiter, so you shouldn't be very obsessed about your condition and angry on me; if you work hard, something which is good for our system, you will be where I am now." And the poor, accepting this "excuse", answers "O.K. now I will not hate you. I will not make a communist party to overthrow you all, because I came as an émigré for being like you. But even rich, keep going in working hard, something which is good for our system, implicit for me, otherwise, you'll be where I am, and I'll be where you are".

Both are right and both, more or less, are translating these rules of the game into life. They make the transition between the upper class, middle-class and the rest difficult, but not impossible. Together with other factors, that gives to the society a dynamism quite remarkable in comparison with other experiments.

The inequality expresses itself different at different levels. It can take the delicate shape of the "first class" or a saloon car. I saw on a street in New York some children waiting in line a

saloon car. A man helping a child, excessively fat and, anyhow, not looking well, got of the car. Maybe he was his father. It seemed to be a celebration, because they were in front of a restaurant. I couldn't forget the triumph from the child's face. It was his moment, and all was thanks to a saloon car. I've known Americans working a lot, for not very much money, but who would not give up their habit of having a daily lunch in a restaurant.

The Tiredness

The strong smell of the coffee from the plane was to be found, like conditioned air, everywhere in the U.S. With a head full of the Hollywood type of women, you are surprised to see a young stewardess approaching with a tired and, somehow, old expression on her face. It was to become a reality to be found at the corner of a street, in an office or subway with a hurried, preoccupied and important woman. If there is some truth in what a friend told me, after coming from U.S., "Believe me, this is a country ruled by women", then this tiredness and extra loneliness is the price paid for, together with their seats from subway and bus.

The Moment

But my challenge was defined by an American friend, towards my attitude of rejecting small journalist facts, for achieving a possible synthesis of what could be the “Americanism”, when she prevented me: ”You’ll find nothing else, but variety. Do not make any generalization about U.S.” For this reason, often I felt myself out of our group or lost in the avalanche of information that came to my fellows.

In Romania journalism has so much bad literature in every related piece of news, that you can suspect that behind every journalist lays a failed writer, when in U.S. behind every big writer there is maybe a failed journalist. It’s quite an evidence that a “Pulitzer Price Winner” is almost a legend.

For Americans, journalism and not a university are the first and the most important step towards great literature. A good journalist is more valuable than hundreds of hermetic writers. I was surprised when my western fellows added to what we call in East-Europe just “literature”, the term “fiction”. ”So, you are making fiction-literature“ they realized, and in their discovery was little disappointment. If in Romania we use to say that almost everybody was born a poet -for not accepting that almost everybody is a bad poet- I would like to think that for Europe, still, literature is literature, without the malicious Anglo-Saxon meaning, because, the magic which

surrounds literature in East-Europe may retain a small difference for European spirit when defining itself towards Americanism. That difference, when comparing journalism and literature in U.S. and in Europe expresses, I think, two different basic philosophies for life. Americans do not trust speculation and something that could be abstract. I remember their frowning expressions when I had used a generalization in sustaining a point of view. Their famous pragmatism is nothing else but a reverence for the concreteness of life; that has the Anglo-Saxon background of the priority and experience and senses in knowledge but, also, a contemporary lust for life itself. Emerson must have been received as boring with his transcendentalism, by a lot of his contemporaries, because the beginnings of the American literature are situated with a journalist who liked to be amusing. It's one of the paradoxes of a country shaped around a puritan conviction, but where, now, a discipline which is capturing "the moment" and "the history of a day" it may reflect, thanks to its preponderance, a historical experience which is at the blossom of its evolution.

The Loneliness

I still retain a taste of loneliness from Saint Paul. In June when it is so hot, streets are

almost wild. At such temperatures, which I didn't expect, there was nobody in courtyards; just a lot of toys in disorder, everywhere, and the American flag raised on a mast. From time to time, a huge car with a low speed approaching carefully to a crossing point, or a woman smiling when you meet her, but changing suddenly the expression of the face after she has passed. A Chinese or a Mongolian restaurant, with prices on the door, but few clients inside, becomes a temptation, if not for their duck recipes, than for exotic eyes and a glass with cold water and ice.

We lived at the Stadium Building, near Grand Avenue, having the rooms of the students, gone in their holidays. The wilderness of the campus was interrupted, daily, by the same student with gloves and sunglasses, cutting the grass. Otherwise, rarely, the street had been traversed by somebody with a dog. More life could you find behind the green door of an Irish Pub or in a Cafe on Grand Avenue. I was to find, also, in other places of U.S., the same picture of personages from those coffee houses: people lost for hours and weeks in front of the same sheet of paper. Most of them had something old in the expression of their faces. Nearby, cakes with different sizes.

The almost mathematical disposal of the streets from the American town expresses the chance, will and time of a young nation for being rational from its beginnings. Something that Europeans from the Balkans, often, has missed.

That's why sometimes I felt a kind of nostalgia after our oriental (Near East) chaos. But on the other hand, SaintPaul with its orderly structure gave me for one day, the courage to go just walking, from the Campus of Macalester College until the Downtown. Following Grand Avenue it took me one day to return back. Up to the downtown, I found the same wilderness broken, maybe, by a Japanese restaurant, then a Mediterranean one. When just for taking a rest, I entered in a small shop, my presence being announced by the tinkling of the doorbell, every time I met first a concerned face, followed by a polite smile. That was perhaps one of the few features, which reminded me the flavor of the western movies that we have grown with.

The Paradox

The paradox of Saint Paul consists in a very Catholic name and style, applied to a Scandinavian and German, if not Protestant, background. Without crowded skyscrapers Saint Paul is not a typical American town. Visiting the History Center-where a European educated with 2000 years exhibits will find pictures with Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey during the 1960 Presidential campaign-presenting the first waves of emigrants and their works, you discover mostly Scandinavian and German names. And yet, the State Capital Building and the Cathedral

of Saint Paul took as a model Michelangelo's lines from Saint Peter Cupola. Inside the State Capital Building you are able to understand that these monuments were designated to be the "churches" of a special, political spirit, which gave birth to a nation. Like other state capital buildings, from other states or like memorials from Washington D.C., they are the most sacred places in a country which made from a Constitution a religion.

Later, I stayed for one week in Columbus, Ohio. Nobody would say that Columbus is not American, beginning with a huge lift outside of a restaurant and a statue of US Grant downtown. And, yet, if you are lucky enough to be there in the period of the festivals, as we were, you find yourself transported in other time and space. Once, just near a quite modern white orthodox church, in a kind of market place, I found a whole ham rolled over the fire. A few people – were sprinkling, from time to time, the roasted golden lamb, with red wine. In other spots of the same market, kebabs, musaka, meatballs and uzo. Everywhere families with their children dressed in white shirts and small hats on their heads. Zorba, was there also, because that was the week of the Greek festival from Columbus. Ulysses, still lost, and searching for his way to Ithaca, gave his respect to the Gods, when his fellow Greek-Americans, sacrificed there, to be roasted, an ox. Few days later, near downtown, in a field, over night, appeared big tents. Inside, smoke that

came from grilled sausages served on steamed cabbage. Members of the bands that were performing had small leather trousers and draught beer. With the exception of the Alps Mountains, everything from Bavaria was there, thanks to the days of the October German Fest.

In their pockets with the name of God and on the lips with human rights, Americans belong to a continent, which more than any other part of the world, has experienced through emigration, the whole planet. It might be an explanation why the Providence had chosen them, to put the first man on the Moon.

The Poetry

One of the most frequent mistakes, which Europeans often do in the States, is a bad understanding of the proportions. Coming from our crowded continent we are sometimes confused by huge distances, huge cars, huge buildings and huge meals. "Size really matters" is telling you even an impressive burger, so called "The Big Hero", which is \$ 3.99. "Take my word, told us a university teacher from Macalester College, when we had our eyes big, facing a one pound beef-stake, that's why the System works: you pay, but you receive!" and he seemed to be visibly proud of it.

Anyhow, I wanted to repeat my adventure with Downtown Saint-Paul, in going to the

Downtown Minneapolis for two very important reasons: to walk among skyscrapers (for every Romanian that would have been the first basic initiation into Americanism) and to see a painting. I knew that The Minneapolis Institute of Art has one of the strangest paintings by Van Gogh, done when the artist was in the asylum at St-Remy-de-Provence. There were some olive trees contorted on hills, with a mountain in the background, everything painted in rather dark red and green colors, suggesting the entire solitude under a drab sun.

Before going to Minneapolis I was in a restaurant called “The Broil”, or something like that, making a plan with a map. I asked the young blond waitress, who at whatever I ordered was delivering the same “It sounds perfect!” if it was possible to walk until Downtown Minneapolis. This time the answer was just silence, at the other tables also, because the room was not large. Those three or four persons from the restaurant came closer to me. “Where are you from”? A man asked me. “I am from Romania.” I answered. Nobody knew where Romania could be, so I told them about Transylvania. “Oh, I’ve been there. It’s a place with high mountains and forests!” said a teen-ager. Because this is an image often associated with Dracula and the Carpathian Mountains are not higher than the Rocky Mountains, I suspected that he maybe didn’t visit Transylvania, but instead he saw many movies. The fact is that everybody had

advised me friendly not to walk almost 10 miles, but to take a bus, which I did.

Again, sometimes reality is breaking the projections of imagination. Near Twin Cities, Mississippi is rather a medium river. On the other hand, to visit an American town at noon is not a very good idea, most of its people being either in the office or at lunch. When almost nobody is on the streets of the Downtown, you may believe that you are passing through a desert of steel, glass, sharp geometry and money. Money, because it seems that the whole town was designed beginning with a bank and around the financial district. Thinking at the fact that now the majority of the products which you can buy in the U.S. are made in Korea, Taiwan, China, Mexico and so on, you ask yourself if not the whole world is designed around a dark, impenetrable window.

At so much waste of space in that country is a surprise to find yourself stifled between two skyscrapers. An artesian well or a small turf is just, too, evident.

And then, something happens...You meet a hurried woman, too formally to be good looking because she is at work and in a hand with a cigarette, because she has a pause from her program and career. At a corner is a smell of potato chips and in a park a stand where you can buy hot dog with onion, pickles and mustard for \$ 2.50. Just nearby is another stand that is selling gyros with mayonnaise and tomato at the same

price. From a bar, where maybe Prince performed once, comes in the street the rhythm of a sleepy jazz. An old fashion car and an ugly building, something like a storehouse.

I had to go back in my country to find that exactly that kind of reality I miss the most. In those stones, in that asphalt is a lot of poetry, because like in a short moment of a blues, there is so much passion in such a narrow space.

The Burger

The Twin Cities are known, especially for westerners, for whom shopping is a way of life and sometimes an ingredient of freedom, as the place of “The Biggest Mall from both American Continents”. I remember, since I visited it, just a building with a very complex and complicated structure. In my country, after ten years from the 1989 Revolution, one of the main attractions of Bucharest, the capital of the country, is the Mall. Not everybody can buy there, a lot of visitors exercising just “window-shopping” as training for capitalism. With MacDonald’s, cable-TV and rap they have an enormous impact on the new generation, like everywhere in East-Europe. They are associated with a spontaneous way, of escaping from the rigor of regimes and tradition. That gives, also, a subtle suggestion, that at least in this historical moment, the meaning of East-revolutions and globalization is

westernization. After all, what made communism possible was a kind of belief included in Marx' works, a "religious" promise, far more important than anything else he wrote. When this belief vanished, the revolution was already done, the same what happened with the French society from the 18th century that lost its faith in feudalism and was prepared for 1789 by some books. As for East-Europe, the burger came after the Catholicism, "Solidarnosc," "star-wars", perestroika and glasnost. The U.S.A. won the Cold War mainly because it was stronger ideologically and spiritually than the communist system. Wealth and military potential would have been nothing without determination. That's why, for Americans it seems to be more difficult to deal with Islamic countries where they have to face a fanatic belief with roots in Mohammed's religion. The Americanism will be efficient towards Arab terrorism, just when it will be effective on the spiritual level. But, how can a burger defeat a special believe in another paradise?

The Excuse

A visit at the Nett Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota is a journey in time. By far, for knowing American Indians, it's better to visit a reservation, as it was there Bois Forte Reservation of Chippewa, where a community of

tribal leaders and teenagers breathes big problems, but real life. At least for me, it was more genuine, than a kind of “Indian show” which I have found at Plymouth Plantation where some actors were roasting a duck. The Reservation from Minnesota has a splendid lake considered to contain the finest wild rice lake in the world. I still remember that melancholy which came from teenagers, having their eyes in the earth, when embarrassed they had tried to explain difficulties of adaptation. When we left, they had given to each of us a small bag of wild rice, like an excuse coming from history. The most industrialized nation in the world, had with necessity to secrete nothing but strange melancholy in contact with those people who refuse, without making noise, to give up their individuality. Equally authentic for Indian Americans, although at the opposite, is a casino run by them, where they find themselves better integrated in American money. There is an opulence coming from people who usually got very easy bored, something that goes together with money. At Mystic Lake Casino from Minnesota I saw sumptuous red rugs, luxurious furniture, huge crystal chandeliers, electronic sounds and lights, old people eating huge amounts of oysters with ketchup.

The Heart

Saint Cloud is a small town situated north of Saint Paul. With a bus, passing just fields, you need few hours to arrive there. The majority of people from that area are farmers, so are Marta and Carol Wegner, where I stayed one week, were farmers, too. But from the bus station until the house and farm we needed another hour with their van. The nearest house was no less than, maybe, 10 miles. They were cultivating sweet corn and soybeans on a huge green surface to be seen from the house until the skyline. The land which in Romania would belong to a village with 1000 people, here was owned and worked by two persons in their sixties.

The Wegners came in that area at the end of the 19th century from Germany. I saw his grave from the churchyard, easy to be seen through an entire transparent wall of the house. What made the first Wegner to leave Bismarck's Germany, and to come to be placed in earth near the small wooden church is something that even Carol didn't know.

But year after year, the land and the grass have been stirred up for about one hundred years by the Wegners, taking their soul, as the churchyard, Wegner's heart.

They looked quite German, especially Marta who seemed to be a Saxon woman from my Transylvania. She was even cooking what I would call a German dish, with sweet potatoes

and roast beef. And yet, their idol was Franklin D. Roosevelt. "He saved our families and farms from being ruined by rich people. He was the president of the- many-", they told me. Like every good Americans they, also, were concerned about cholesterol, looking for "low fat" products. I remember the lust from Carol's face when he had explained to me with a sigh, having on the table a roast chicken, that the golden skin is the best but, unfortunately, was full of cholesterol.

A Romanian farm or Romanian agriculture from 1995 is a joke in comparison with what the Wegners were doing. They had more than a dozen of different tractors. Few of the most famous literary pages written by Steinbeck, would be impossible there. They were able to take care of about one hundred caws, also seen from the window-wall. A tank with corn, not far from the house, was as tall as a block of flats with five or six floors.

Prices of corn and weather forecast were taken from the internet, together with recipes for cooking. On the other hand, for making all those things work, they both left the house at 5a.m.coming back at 7p.m.

For the 4th of July, I was with them. The 4th of July is personal, intimate and private, deep, in the their souls. It has become an opportunity for a family reunion that I would, forever, associate with picnics, huge quantities of ice cream, fireworks, quite common acrobatic games and childish enthusiasm.

"Lucian, money makes everything move!" told me several times a day, in appropriate moments, P J.J., publisher and owner of newspaper from Paynesville. Paynesville was even closer to the Wegners than Saint Cloud and I have been advised to follow him in his daily activity. To follow him is a way of speaking, because I couldn't keep step with his infernal schedule. He seemed all the time to be in hurry for money. In a morning, I left my bed at 3a.m. - this is the hour that Romanian peasants in autumn are going to protect their corn from wild boars and to go to see the printing of the newspaper. Then we went at the office, for the process of writing articles and elaboration, while the whole afternoon was occupied with delivering the newspaper personally, with his car.

Nevertheless, his family was rich, I guess. They had two houses -one of them right on the lake- many cars and a Ford boat. Once, after a big rain, I remember him catching in a small drain, carps of 30 or, maybe 40 pounds, each. In Central Europe or in my country there is a valuable tradition in cooking this fish for special occasions like Christmas or New Year. That's why I was surprised when he told me "We eat just Wallay or maybe Salmon. But people from Iowa eat carp."

If somebody wants to understand better F. Scott Fitzgerald he must go in Saint Paul, definitely, in the heat of the summer and to do nothing. Otherwise, this town is becoming the

most aristocratic in the coldness of October, when gently touched by the gold of sun and leafs. Or, how they call it, by the "Indian summer".

The Cathedral

We began our journey in the U.S.A. with Seattle, after a four hours flight from Saint Paul. Gorgeous beginning! If other American towns are more or less on their own, sustaining themselves through architecture as an autonomous reality, Seattle cannot be conceived without its surroundings. It's enough just to look on the map to risk defining it like...a postmodern "Venice ". Anyhow, coming with the ferry from Bainbridge Island to downtown Seattle is unique and spectacular. There is a cathedral of blue, red, green and yellow lights dancing in the salty breeze and sparkling like precious stones forgotten on hills.

Four years later this town will be known for "The battle of Seattle". The downtown was under siege from hundred of demonstrators confronting police, in a protest against globalization. I would say that this was a historical moment because it was the first episode, followed, in the year 2000, by conflicts in Davos -Switzerland-and Prague -Czech Republic-, in which people are blaming The International Monetary Fund and The World Bank for not being able to erase poverty around

the globe. That confrontation will find it's plenary proportions, I think, in the 21st century. Now, it just spontaneously reflects two opposite trends for humanity: a tendency towards a greater integration and relations because of technology, mass-media and Internet, a process more or less controlled; on the other hand, after the failure of communism, the necessity of another doctrine or ideology as opposed to the capitalism, which won three world wars, but still, cannot deal with the challenges that are expected to come from the new millennium. Instinctively, people era looking around for a new kind of modern holiness, when they invested so much, emotionally, in Pope John Paul II, Mother Theresa or Lady D. Anyhow, there is a deep warning in the fact that the first "battle" took place where Bill Gates-the richest man on the planet, but, also, thanks to the Internet, the person "in charge" for a faster globalization - has his residence.

In 1995 in Seattle, I had to fight only with bouillabaisse, that seafood soup, offered certainly in a big portion-the best in the States- and other kinds of fresh seafood that give, with their specific smell, a distinct note to the town.

It's a pity that the fate has chosen the south of California for Hollywood, because in terms of nature the Northwest Coast of the U.S.A., like New England on the East Coast, is the most beautiful. But thanks to the movies, there is an entire mythology related just with the

south, much better known overseas. We were able to realize that, when we continued our trip with a van through Oregon to San Francisco. There were many hours for 11 people to stay crowded and to stop just for eating or going to the bathroom. Could be the reason why many Americans, who have spoken with us about our trip, had had the same question “And you don’t hate one another?” Despite all those, it was enough just to see, from time to time, the green-blue waves of the Pacific Ocean in order to get a magic feeling. The date with the Pacific Ocean, on the right side, while on the left are the Santa Lucia Mountains, is like a return on the primordial waters and days...”the greatest meeting of land and water on Earth “.

The Box

In San Francisco I saw for the first time something that had astonished me, but which, eventually, I was to find in big American towns like New York or Chicago: a man in a paper box. He was a beggar asking for ”change” and collecting coins in a plastic bottle for Coke. Obviously, this box was his house, because there were some clothes inside. He tried even to give beauty to his universe with a vase containing plastic flowers. Nevertheless, he had a good sense of humor, telling to whoever was approaching “I’m still available for adoption”,

maybe an irony to some of the most common American patterns.

Even if so many people are emigrating in the States, for what is called “the American Dream”, which consists, at least, in a house and two cars, Americans do not care for property as the most of Europeans do. Many of them, rather prefer, to rent apartments or houses for the rest of their life and to spend money traveling or in other ways. In U.S. there are everywhere advertising on buildings writing “For rent!” That is happening because Americans are changing all the time their jobs. But on the other hand, they change with such mobility their job, thanks to the fact that they don’t want to put a life, into a house.

Again, that gives an amazing dynamism to the society and, as Tocqueville observed in 1830, this is the main obstacle for the emergence of aristocracy, which is always related with the possession-of earth or houses-and tradition.

More important than anything is the philosophy which lay beneath a box, a renting or traveling...Because Americans refuse to work only for what is “immobile “or “fixed “, we may guess that they avoid to fix themselves in something which can mortify their life.

As a young nation, life itself is the main value of Americans in this historical moment and thanks to it, they had the energy to dominate the end of a century. The respect for life has been “imprinted “in the “genetic code” of the nation

when in the “Declaration of Independence”- which is for a country what the spirit is for a human being-was specified the right to happiness! Besides, what are freedom, liberty and equality without happiness, which is the sign of a fulfilling life? Then, happiness is the purpose of the first three values and if you find that in a box, maybe, is O.K. I do not know other state’s Constitution to have mentioned that “small “desideratum and, here, I became superstitious in finding an emotional reason for the longevity even of the American Constitution.

As for the humor of the man from the box, there’s little pride in belonging to a great nation, despite social status. This feeling is more important than anything in keeping a nation together. That gives respect for authority, ahead of the policeman, and determines the man from the box to win wars for his country. Before going to the States, often, I’ve heard that because Americans have so many emigrants and just two hundred years of existence as a state, there is not a national identity. But almost every house has the national flag raised, no matter if it’s rich or poor. Expressions like ”This is America!” or ”This is a free country!” might be used sometimes for hypocritical reasons but, nevertheless, reflect that drop of pride, which carried on the hand to the heart when the national anthem is performed.

San Francisco is the most “Far East“ town from the U.S.A., thanks to the number of Chinese

Americans and Japanese Americans who are there. I was to read later in some reviews that, in many aspects, San Francisco is considered to be in the first top 10 most beautiful towns all over the world; together with some others, like Vienna, Paris, Salzburg and Venice. The combination between the “Tudor style“, East and “salsa“ is one of the most charming. Those, plus the Golden Gate in the night and an authentic “margarita “taken in the heat of July, might explain the charisma of S.F.

As for me, for ever in love with Chicago, I was surprised to find that such a famous town is can be seen on foot to a degree that from the Fish Market, passing nearby seals and the Old Station you don't need more than one hour to go round downtown. That is of course if you don't stop in a “Sex Shop” in your way, which I did. For somebody coming from Ceausescu's puritan country that was a manner of discovering how far American Puritanism is dealing with freedom.

Every American downtown is the most impressive in the night, when becoming a kind of organ concert, made by huge colored crystals. A strange violet light is covering San Francisco in these hours. What foreigner wouldn't go to see what China Town means when in a big downtown? If San Francisco, with not so many inhabitants as many other American towns, gives an impression of a polished jewel, than China Town is the same; not so diverse and dynamic like that from New York, but with a lot of style.

The Pearl

What do San Francisco and Chicago have in common, besides belonging to the same country? A gangster! In Romania -and I imagine in other countries, too-just the name Chicago is associated with a mixed sensation of murders, guns and terror. Anyhow, a town with a very bad reputation where you wouldn't go. That's a pity because, "The Windy City" is a safe and beautiful town. Situated, somehow, in the middle of the American continent, it became the very essence of the American town. It didn't confront significant influences from the Far East, Europe, Latin America or even Canada. If somebody would ask me what town from the U.S.A. to visit-just one-I would say without any hesitation: Chicago!

Still, this town, like San Francisco through Alcatraz, is linked with Al Capone. In the city from the Pacific Coast, one of the main tourist attractions is the fortress where Al Capone was imprisoned for life. A visit there is \$ 10 for a ticket, taken not very far from the Fish Market. Long lines of people are waiting like at the Statue of Liberty in New York or to the White House. I don't think that Andrew Jackson's "Hermitage"-despite being on the \$ 20 bill and having a statue in front of the White House and one of the best presidents-which I have visited later, has so many visitors. But thanks to the same Hollywood, like Dracula from my country, Al Capone is a myth.

He represents the dark side of the American “self made man”. In Romania foreigners are looking desperately for Dracula’s castles...especially Americans. So, we have almost invented them not to loose money and mainly, not to disappoint a belief. The waves coming from the austere Alcatraz brought to me one of Hegel’s thoughts, something which would sound like: “Whoever contemplates death, becomes Master over the others, who are struggling for their life, and over their memory”.

In that moment I was rather “convinced” to give those \$10 on a pearl. Also very close to the Fish Market, some Japanese Americans were selling pearls taken with a knife directly from an oyster, which you would have chosen it. It was how I wanted to leave and remember San Francisco where I had stayed just a day: as a pearl in an oyster.

The Issue

Los Angeles, as the whole of the U.S., was in that moment full of the O.J. Simpson trial. And not only them. In Romania NBC and CNN International were according hours, for a long period of time, to that trial, concerning issues about which Romanians couldn’t understand anything. It seemed to me that most people from U.S. got bored and tired, being whipped at every news bulletin with the same information.

Sometimes I had the impression that the American press was feeding itself, making news from news. The trial itself was not about race. An African-American was under the suspicion of having killed his ex-wife and her boyfriend. It might have happened before. Nothing new under the sun. The stature of O.J Simson was really new and his money

The trial was another example that in mentality, from a racial point of view, the American society is somehow segregated. It was almost a belief or a religion: all the African-Americans were convinced that O.J. was not guilty. The other had other opinion. I was in New York when the verdict was given. O.J. turned his face to the members of the jury and whispered “Thank you“. For most of African-Americans that moment was a kind of relief and a celebration.

Visiting the Superior Court on 210 West Temple Street, I was surprised to find how small the room was. TV is always projecting in our imagination proportions different than reality is, creating the impression that there is a place not accessible to your life and will. The biggest mystification from all...O.J. was just a very tired and pale man, again, not so tall as it seemed to me on TV. There was also Judge Lance too- Jay Leno was making fun of him almost every night.

But African-Americans have real outstanding public personalities. In Dallas, I've seen Jassie Jackson keeping a speech...

It was a strange music brought from the African-American church into the public life. Something between torrents of words, overthrown on listeners, and the whistling of a snake. Wherever African-American express themselves, fundamental is the rhythm. All those, plus Faulkner from "The Sound and the Fury" I found in Atlanta, where we attended the Sunday morning services, at Ebenezer Baptist Church. There, the Gospel, the music, the dance and poetry were suspended out of the time, in the pure communion of hands and voices. One of the most impressive personalities that I met in the U.S. was the Rev. Bernice King, the daughter of Martin Luther King. It was in Atlanta, too, on Shallowford Road. We had expected an older person. Instead, from an open door came a young, beautiful woman, smiling charmingly.

The contrast between her age and the total harmony of the personality was fascinating. As in music, harmony should be that point where different contrasts vanish in another, deeper together with spiritual sound, coming from the other realm. About her famous father she told us: "He educated himself all the time, preparing his character and will. It seemed, he knew from the beginning what was expected from him; which will be his destiny and his end. But when he began his public life, it was an eruption. Everybody who met him went through the experience of meeting a personality that will change the life of African-Americans."

About racial discrimination she believed: "In America there is not physical segregation but there still is a lot of separation. Everybody knows which part of the city is white and which part is black. We work together, but that ends there. We don't see each other in our free time".

The Patrol

Of course, our next stop in Los Angeles was the L.A.P.D. In 1995 "LA Confidential" had not been made. Neither was "Pulp Fiction". Sgt. Wes McBride gave us a brief lecture on gangs from different neighborhoods and the methods they had taken in dealing with them. We have seen pictures of horror. Massacres full of blood and hacked bodies. Knifes, guns and drugs. Different manners of hacking, as various tattoos, suggested a style and a gang: Latino, African-American or Porto Rican. They had very strictly delimitated areas. Most of the crimes were the result of realm wars between them. Their members had astonishing early ages, because the gang from a certain neighborhoods replaced with surprisingly magnetism the family, school and university. Maybe, there was a matter of not enough money invested for breaking those neighborhoods and raising the level of education. L.A.P.D. was doing the best it could for an issue with more global causes. There were, from my point of view, economical, social and political

premises.

The culminating point of our L.A.P.D. visit was the breath taking drive with Police cars, in various neighborhoods of LA. The pictures we had seen before scared us enough. But when they gave us anti-bullet vests and some papers to sign, just in case we would die, I told to myself "That's it! How stupid. I didn't die in the Revolution, to accomplish that, here, in a town which, after all, I don't like". We must have looked pale and stupid, titillated with useless papers and cameras, nevertheless perplexed. In the "Operation Safe Streets" we spent about four hours cruising L.A. We were situated in the back of the cars after bars. We couldn't open the doors. In a sense we experienced the delicious sensations American offenders must have felt. Officers were doing almost the same things. When one of them was drinking a coffee, the other was also drinking his coffee. They began to eat in the very same moment, taking the same sandwich, from the same colored paper and from identically two iron boxes.

They drove in dark places where they knew we could find people from gangs. Gangs were announced by huge graffiti drawings-the modern 20th fresco of the American town. Using lanterns the officers were calling a walking shadow to come to our car. Some of them had tattoos all over their bodies. It seems that we were, together with officers, dealing as connoisseurs for some works of art. The gang

persons were extremely docile and with courtesy towards us. Everybody had explained the symbolism and rituals of some tattoos of the gang they belonged to. The car was rolling with no more than 25 miles per hour. Most of the time anyway. Suddenly, when the speed was raised at more than 90 miles per hour, we understood that something happened. With my mind, I imagined myself in the middle of a struggle between our two officers and the members of a gang.

I didn't want to go further and to discover where would I have been more precisely in the picture. Fact is, the car stopped near a house, where 10 other police cars were. I was looking at the sky for helicopters.

One of the officers told us to wait behind the back doors of the car...From such a concentration of force I expected the worse. What was happening? A Mexican-American was beating his wife. The police picked him up easily.

The Prophet

In Los Angeles our residence was at UCLA. Maybe this is why, even now, I'm not sure what Downtown LA is like. But there we've had the opportunity to meet one of the greatest professors from America. A prophet, almost. Alvin Toffler was his name and he was a Futurist. At my university, when I was a student, his book "Future Shock" was one of the most quoted. Leaders from all over the world

consulted him. Ceausescu invited him, once, in Bucharest, as, the first Romanian president after the Revolution, Ion Iliescu, did.

In the U.S.A. he was in good terms with Newt Gingrich, whom he considered one of the cleverest politicians from Washington. In return, Newt Gingrich, then, in the best moment of his career, took a lot, for his republican philosophy, from Alvin Tofflers ideas. Gingrich narrated how, when he was just a history teacher, he covered huge distances in U.S., just to attend Toffler's conferences. Later, as the Speaker of the House, he sent the book "Creating a New Civilisation", as a "must-read" book for the republican representatives. Was Alvin Toffler waiting more, from a successfully political career of Newt? Then he predicted wrong, for the Speaker, dramatically fell after Clinton was not dismissed from the Office.

We met him in a classroom at UCLA. Following him when he was answering our questions, I realised that he was able to make predictions about the future due to two things: first, he had a tremendous culture and he studied very well the past. Only somebody who understands the past is able to see in the future, as, the best politicians were those who knew that politics is nothing, but history applied to the present time. The second quality, which made him a kind of modern Nostradamus, was the fact that he had the rare intuition of seeing the reality as being all the time in change. When for most of

the people things appear to be fixed, for him nothing was, as it seemed to be. Even states or countries. Toffler's advantage is that he is thinking in a global manner: when somebody, looking on a map finds just borders, he discovers moving structures.

One of his visionary ideas, which has greatness, is the prophecy about the revolt of the rich people. Indeed, what marked the 20th century, according to Ortega Y Gasset, was the "Revolt of the masses". Nietzsche who rejected the French Revolution predicted those, also. To some extends, Marxism and Communism were part of the revolt of the poor people. According to Nietzsche, thanks to the fact that history is a cycling process, the 21st century might see the revolt of the rich and the birth of a new planetary aristocracy. Toffler finds some analogous conclusions, beginning not from the movement of the spirit, but from the distribution of wealth, among countries and in the world. What was to be confirmed quite soon, was his prediction about the new "wave" and future "shock" coming from the revolution of biology. More and more parliaments are now debating, how far genetics should be applied into the human's life. Would Alvin Toffler agree to be redoubled by genetics, which in term of biology is attempting to take God's job? It's a question that is surpassing futurology towards religion.

The Dream

You wouldn't be a human being or you don't belong to your time if you leave Los Angeles without going to Hollywood. That means, the whole spirit which covers like a veil some parts of Los Angeles: a famous hotel where Rudolf Valentino first arrived; a street with palm trees and rich people; a bad taste building where there is a very important theatre; the imprinted hands of Marilyn Monroe and her blond smile looking at the camera when she did that; a leather jacket which belonged to Arnold Swartzneger in, I don't know what movie, for sale at the Universal Studious at the price of \$ 2000; and an arid hill with letters on it, where you can eat the best enchilada .

Few spots on Earth were so important in our century, as Hollywood. With the Wall Street from New York and a certain building from Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C., Hollywood shaped the contemporary life.

But it did that from an, almost, religious point of view. In a period of history when God was announced as being dead and morality useless, when everybody got bored, when books were replaced by Nothing, Hollywood gave the entertainment, together with the dream. When beauty, which, once, was supposed to save the world-Goethe considered it as being superior to ethics, because it included the last-was banished from our life, becoming too expensive, it came

back having the golden charm of Marilyn Monroe.

When heroes were not possible any more, after two world wars looking ludicrous, heroism came back, having the expression of Garry Cooper and John Wayne.

When because of material difficulties, almost everybody felt older; you went to the Cinema to take back in your room, as an icon, the youthfulness and the immortality of James Dean. Almost everybody from my age, and not only, grew with images and ideas taken from Hollywood, which replaced for a generation, in good and bad, books and preaching. To that extent, Hollywood was the modern replica of the Golden Age, in a period when a real offer couldn't unify humanity, as some movies did. It took the place of a strange religion - "religare" meant in Latin to connect people-, when "Star Wars" convinced Catholics, protestants, Arabs and Jews, Buddhists and nihilists, that the common threat comes from aliens. It gave a kind of spirit, and where a church was not possible anymore, it transformed the cinema room in that place where imagination and soul were free again.

On the other hand, sometimes, Hollywood produced a degradation of the modern human being. It covered the world of the Word and books, which are at the beginning of what is human, and through it, the fundament of existence, as a whole. Books are still closer, to what are deep and spiritual in people, because

they are the spirit itself. And while many Americans are reading in buses and subways, still, the majority of them are looking at "The correct price".

Giving models, Hollywood sharpened values and tastes of people from all over the world, according to its priorities, which not always were the best. Offering ways of life, with the power of suggestion and advertising, it pauperised the human being from being itself. It deprived people in following a destiny on their own. The "Actor" replaced the real human. And if it's true that Hollywood and an actor won the Cold War, than it has also controlled the mind of a planet. Another, modern form of abortive religion, also given by technology, will replace this power: the Internet. People will be connected and "relegated" through the electronic mail, which rediscovered, in the virtual space, the Word. The actor will lose his, almost, mythological size to other forms of modern representation, less spectacular and more intimate.

Still in LA, we saw, also, Warner Bros. studios in Burbank. Another surprise, at least for me. Because, there is such a difference between the building that you expect to find, thinking at those movies which made you imagine the unbelievable, and a kind of bigger hut which was there. Inside, another surprise. A tall, African-American was eating a hamburger, smiling politely to us. He was sitting lonely, waiting, I

don't know what. He was the "most famous American" shooting a cartoon with a rabbit. When Michael Jordan is eating his hamburger so close, sometimes, for some people, for whom he is a modern hero, it is not difficult to dream. The distance from dream to reality becomes smaller.

The Skyline

With "United Airlines" we have arrived in Denver. It was for the first time that I felt closer to my country. My homesickness, which sometimes like a ghost was hovering above me, was diminished there. Not very far from Denver it is possible to see the mountains. Because Transylvania is surrounded by Carpathian Mountains, and my hometown, Sibiu, is less than 30 miles away from them, they became a part of every day life. That's why, in big American towns or in megalopolis like Los Angeles, I've had all the time the impression that something fundamental is missing. Later, in Chicago, even from the Sears Tour, I was able to see just urban extents. Landscapes where you are born and grow with, in time, become a part of who you are. You cannot escape from the "skyline" of your soul. It's already defining you and you are taking with you that reality wherever you go.

In US, thanks to a very advanced technological heritage, you can feel that, quite, in the so called "countryside", you are still in an

urban reality. To some extends, in spite of the fact that nature is better protected than in Romania, still, there, the "nature" disappears. The essence of the American landscape is the downtown with skyscrapers. Manhattan and Downtown Chicago are the best expression of the American soul. In my country, big towns are nothing but extensions of villages. Our history and tradition are so connected with the reality of the village, that this is the most fundamental feature of the Romanian soul. In towns, between blocks of flats, the "nature" appears like grass from the cracked asphalt. If a Romanian is emigrating in the US, because in his soul he is basically a peasant, his house, street or neighbourhood, will have something from a village, even if he works for the "Ford Company". The communism had the ambition of transforming Romania, in a very short time, in a highly industrialised country, able to be a competitor for capitalist countries. For that, like in Stalin's Russia, peasants were obliged to migrate to the town. The attempt was not successful, partly, because those people remained in themselves, just with the nostalgia for what they lost. They tried to recreate the "haven ", how they could. In Chicago, it's possible to recognise immediately a group of Romanians, from the way they are making the grill, just near the Michigan Lake, among other emigrants from Russia, Bosnia or South America.

In America the nature "disappears" thanks

to the fact that in the western civilisation - and the USA is for the moment it's best representative- nature is considered an "object" to be assumed and processed by the "subject", which is the "reason" and its extension, technology. That's what industry is about. Even food in US is less "natural", because it supported the influence of that technology; while the "naturist" food is an attempt which recoveries at higher costs what is, still, nature, an issue, anyhow, for the rich people.

"The March to West" was the story about taking in possession the nature by technology, against its last defenders: the American Indians. From all of today's Americans, Indians and the Amish population are the last who, still, retain the deep lost feeling of the nature. The ecologists are trying to rediscover the reality of the nature, beginning from modern premises; often, this has been seen as the only efficient alternative to the capitalism as an ideology, and to Americanism. In the U.S.A it seems to be, more and more important, if we are thinking just at the "2000 election".

In Romania and, maybe, other, more or less, eastern countries, the nature "appears" because Romanians, themselves, were, during their history, "subject" to the nature. It's an explanation why Romanians have certain "passivity" towards life, not typical for the western human being. Oswald Spengler in his "The decline of the West" writes even about,

what he calls, the "vegetal nations "

Fact is, to realise all those, I had, in the same manner that you are looking at a painting, to take a little distance. For understanding how our nature is important for Romanians, I had to live later, for one year, in Chicago. Where, wherever you look, you see, just... Chicago.

As, I had to come back in a village, near the Carpathian mountains, for some years, to miss the lights in the night from Michigan Avenue, tired faces of people from subway, coming from their jobs or crowds out at Belmont, in the evening, at "Chicago Cubs".

The mountains are closer if you go to Colorado Springs. Could that be the town where "Doctor Quinn " takes place? Besides a beautiful golden light covering the surroundings of the city, I remember a golden trout that I had in a small restaurant. Trout can be found in every restaurant from US, but what else could be better than in a location surrounded by fast rivers?

There was "Focus on the Family", in the same, Colorado Springs; a Christian publishing and broadcasting enterprise. Nobody is creating so fast and so easy associations, as Americans do; Tocqueville was right, again. This one was patronised by a Dr. Dobson, who, for his members, was almost a mythical figure. I've heard a tape in which people were telling how he saved their life. His name was coming out, in almost every sentence. For a republican candidate to the presidency of the U.S., it would

have been a mistake not to have good connections with Dr. Dobson. At least, they had a lot of money.

"Focus on the Family" New International Headquarters, located at the eastern foot of the Rockies, was an impressive building painted in yellow and purple. It looked like an Institute for a Research. The advertising was "Dedicated to the preservation of the home". Indeed, when in the US it became a problem just to define a family - in a course taken at Macalester, I found that there are almost ten types of possible families -, when the number of divorces is increasing, "Focus on the Family " with all it's conservative smack, is answering to a social demand only, if you accept as a premise, the principle that the classical old-fashioned family is the best. In the Headquarters, the same opulent mixture of black marble, glass, polished iron and modern stained.

Anyhow, Denver suggested to me, more than other American towns, the old town from westerns. Not only because I saw in the Downtown many carriages. Mostly, young couples were in them. Carriages made a strange contrast with fancy and very expensive cars, driven by teenagers, while the electric bulbs were everywhere in the trees. It was a sensation, which I cannot explain now, that everybody knew everybody.

On the other hand, the feeling of a conservative town must have been based on an experience of myself. One day, I left the Ramada

Inn were we stayed, on E. Colfax St., for a walk in downtown. In the afternoon, restaurants are full of people who are eating, drinking, talking. Because of the window, sometimes you see them and they see you. I took a "Budwiser" beer, drinking and looking, absent-minded, at the orange light, falling on tables and faces of the consumers. I saw a very nervous policeman leaving his table and dish, and coming straight to me from the door of the restaurant, telling me to throw the bear into a dustbin. He was not joking, and he looked so angry, that I did what he asked in a second. Without this incident, I would have never understood why on American sidewalks, sometimes, you could see people with paper bags at their mouth.

The Sophistication.

In Denver I met the first real American politician. It was a she, because Patricia Schroeder was a Congresswoman for the State of Colorado.

In her office, Pat Schroeder had a big picture of herself with Bill Clinton. She managed to be extremely pleasant until the end of the interview. More than anything, she was a sophisticated woman. The word "sophistication" has Greek roots, like "sophism" and "sophists". While "sophism" means a false reasoning, if not a deliberate lie, and "sophists" were the Greek

philosophers able to justify anything, when we meet a politician, the non-verbal language is more important than the real one. Essential for Pat Schroeder was her capacity for postponing the first reaction and answer. Psychologists consider that in this space, where the difference between animal and the human being appears, is the place for thinking and deliberation. If we take this as a premise, than politicians are the wisest people. In the American politics, this is the space, for all commissions and hard teamwork, which is behind every single decision. It is one explanation, among others, why US politics was so efficient, yet. We have to accept that Americans had the best politics in the 20th century, because they had the best results. In the days of the 1989 Romanian Revolution, the American administration was the last in the world to come with a statement about what was happening in our country. In 1996 president Clinton visited Romania. It was just before a NATO meeting, where it was in debate the acceptance of new members. Our administration had had the naiveté to consider that, through a huge demonstration of people from Bucharest for NATO, we'd convince Bill Clinton and his team to accept that year Romania in NATO. In fact it happened much later.

Everybody seemed to forget that American decisions are fruits of a long process of deliberation; that the conclusion about not accepting yet Romania had been taken long

before Clinton's visit.

When in the U.S.A. the press is so powerful, sophistication brings with it hypocrisy. In a country where equality is so much emphasised -even if it is equality just in opportunities- that is to say, that you are equal with other, knowing very well that you are more powerful, more different, than them, not to say, unequal. So, thanks to the fact that American politicians are now the strongest in the world, we may suspect that they are the most hypocrites. But we should not forget that hypocrisy is a kind of lie and behaviour afraid by the other's force.

Pat Schroeder was sophisticated mainly because she was refined and subtle. The way she was dressed-black sober and rich, with a jewel forgotten somewhere, the way she smiled, the way she kept her hands, her low voice and her discreet, but expensive perfume, every-thing produced the aristocrat politician.

Despite her membership at the Democrats, the congresswoman, still, retained the distance. The exercise of power, as the exercise of wealth refines somebody, even if there is the desire of belonging to the "many". Somewhere in his "Humbold's Gift", Saul Bellow believes that the future Dictator of America, the incarnation of the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, definitely, will come from the Democratic Party.

The Cross

Statistics assume that one of two Romanians, whose population now is about 22 millions, would emigrate in the USA. This is a result, also, of a movie, which, in Ceausescu's time, was the most popular for a decade: "Dallas". Saturdays, there was no woman in my country to lose Bobby and JR Ewings adventures. When Larry Hagman visited, after the Revolution, Romania, he said that for Ceausescu's regime that was a big mistake: to give to the people the opportunity to make a comparison between what they saw in the movie and their poverty. Indeed, for most of my fellows the life in the U.S.A. should be as at "The Ewing Ranch".

All over the world, Dallas is, forever, related with the most famous assassination of the 20th century: that of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, on 22 November 1963. My father, often, told me, how himself and my mother, together with other 20 families went at the only T.V. close to them, to see the funeral. Now, that moment with the small John Kennedy - recently vanished in a plane accident - saluting with his hand his dead father, is classic.

For me, it was mysterious to stay, in the light, on the same spot of the highway, near the purple store -house for books, where the president lived his last moments. It's the same strangeness, which surrounds the dead body and

the life itself, of somebody whom we have spoken to just with a few days before. In the heat of august, with the exception of some trees, everything is the same, as in that November. If we remember a certain movie that was made in those moments, J.F.K. was defending himself, against the strong sun of Dallas, with his charismatic smile-by all means, offered to his voters, but also to his fate. The end was accompanied by smiles, flowers and that class which followed him everywhere. He found his death with dignity: a privilege given by gods to those taken from life when they are young. "The Sixth Floor Museum" is that part of the building from Elm Street, where is it supposed that Lee Harvey Oswald stayed, when he killed the president. As other American museums, there are pictures, newspapers and voices from that day, relating what happened. Also, images and addresses of J.F.K. Near a window, a rifle, some bullet tubes on the floor and a number of paper boxes used, probably by Oswald to support the gun. If you look out from that window, you are surprised to find how close the highway is, and what an easy target, the president must have been.

Earlier in Saint Paul we interviewed Jack Tunheim, Minnesota's chief deputy attorney general who chaired the Kennedy Commission in charge of declassifying documents relating to the assassination of J.F.K. His conclusion was that, so far, despite speculations, Lee Harvey Oswald

was the only one involved in the murder. The same result had a commission appointed by Clinton to investigate the case; like, as I saw on "Discovery" Channel, recently, an inquiry conducted by KGB- then one of possible suspects- which established as highly probable that the bullets came from the same window. Finally, all those shadows are part of the legend. The truth would diminish his stature. Frank Rigg, curator at J.F.K. Library, from Boston, MA, told us that, unalterable, in the polls, John Kennedy is in the first five American presidents of history.

One of the main attractions of the "Arlington Cemetery" from Washington DC is J.F.K.'s grave black granite, sober but stately, with a flame in the middle. Near him, in death, eternity and legend, Jackline. In a visit done by John Kennedy with his brother Bobby at the Cemetery, not long before his visit to Dallas, it seems that the president had indicated the place for his grave. On the other hand it real despite all speculations that Robert McNamara decided that the best spot for JFK's grave should be in Arlington. It was a good choice. Not very far from that point, on a soft edge of a green hill, there is a white wooden cross.

There is no name on it, but is Bobby's Kennedy cross and grave. "In love with night", himself, as he used a Shakespearean metaphor for his lost brother.

There is no doubt that Robert Kennedy was unique in American history, as his brother

was. As a personality, he was far more interesting after J.F.K. tragic end. He became hamletian, by all means. Then he began to read Aeschylus and Camus. Something like a Greek tragedy and curse followed his family, even after his death. Pictures from the period when he decided to run for the U.S. presidency, reveal moments of melancholy and suffering. Not the political animal but a poet of public life, able to understand betters the humble side of existence. After Adlai Stevenson, America, and the world, lost another hope in having in the Oval Office somebody to rehabilitate high culture and spirit from a political level.

It's a thrilling similitude between the Kennedy brothers and the Gracchus brothers. Both pairs died, murdered, when they tried to reform the State - "The Bill of The Civil Rights" adopted under L.B. Johnson, was Kennedy's project. Both faced an extremely difficult period of their countries: a revolutionary one and big challenges overseas. For the US, the period of the "sixties" was the fourth revolution after moments like American Revolution, "Andrew Jackson's" years and the Civil War; a corner stone for what was to come in history in the last 40 years. The Kennedy as the Gracchus, although belonged to the upper class, were democrats and oriented against the oligarchy. Finally, if Gaius Gracchus, because of his reforms, was very close to the Caesarism, John Kennedy, after Samuel Huntington's opinion -a Harvard Professor- was

the most powerful president in a position to shape an American dynasty.

With all the conditioned air in the world, you need courage to stay in Dallas in august. In the Downtown, streets are empty. During the day, and the night. I walked just between banks. Banks banks and again, banks. Glass, steel and heated asphalt. Somewhere more peripheral, a Mason Temple. When on a street I came closer to an African-American woman, to ask her about a museum, first, scared, she went away, making signs with her hands; something like, she, anyway, didn't know anything. Then, probably regretting her behaviour, she came back to answer my question. Maybe, many feel like being hunted; otherwise, why does everybody seem scared by everybody?

This was not the situation found by us in a restaurant, famous for it's Texan barbecues. On the contrary, there, everybody was happy. Balloons and coloured paper were hurled from a table to another table. Country music was performed and dancing.

The barbecues were a real sensation for me: big steaks, no more and no less than cow bones with a lot of meat on them very tasteful. If somebody is looking for American cuisine, very American is to eat any other country's cuisine, because here, also, it's been experienced the world's diversity. But after that, if you lose a Texan barbecue, taken only in Texas, you'll never know what America means. Something, like the

same sensation with having a huge car, all the time with it's engine on, even when you are shopping for hours.

The Celebration

Only hot nights find the real Miami. The strong perfumes of exotic flowers come together with burnt Cubans coffee, discreet lights of restaurants, the salty grilled fish and the low sound of the Ocean in the background. Then, the Ocean Drive, which is very close to the sea, is full of people. The discoloured blue from the Deco District and the dark blue of the Ocean, burn like love. This is the hour of the Latino blood and soul. The hour of pairing and dance. The hour of life.

In the daytime, under a strong sun and moisture, it's hard not to wish all the time to take a shower. Or to drink all the time "Fanta". Or to look desperately for conditioned air. But this is not what Miami is about. Nor the Coconut Grove, neither the Coral Gables, where Madonna has a villa.

But, late, late in the night if you, still, keep in yourself a drop of life, the instinct will help you to discover Little Havana. There, at "Centro Vasco", a popular Spanish night club, with a glass of "Sangre del Torro", a black strong wine, you learn that, there are communities not scared to bring one of their ones, closer to the

deities. Because the singer from the club was almost a goddess, Cuban-Americans called her Diva Albita. Her music, supported by golden trumpets, drums and guitars, and a feeling of fulfilment, were passing in the veins, as fast, as the black wine. Gloria Estefan must have began, also, venerated, somewhere, in heart of Miami's Little Havana. Anyway, you may easily realise, that those hot nights and such Latino restaurants are in Miami more important than jobs, money, church and cars. They focus the energy and life of the people from there. Hours spent in restaurants by them are more than a ritual. This is not a very American way of thinking.

Many say that Miami and Florida are places for old and retired Americans. That, in Florida is the most important retired community from the States. That whoever has finished his business with life, in order not to embarrass the others and the society itself, is going there, where it is possible to wait for the end, as some animals vanish in strange spots, not to offer the image of suffering and misery.

The easiest explanation would be that there is no need for so much food and clothes like in other states. Because of the high temperatures. So, the costs of life are less expensive than elsewhere. Anyhow, a better alternative than gambling money in Las Vegas. But this is just a convenient explanation. It should be more than that.

The high dignity of Miami and Florida is

given by the fact that they are the invitation to the celebration of life. There, the "big moment" is, forever, postponed. Death becomes the opportunity for the transfiguration of life. Only in this way can we understand why Hemingway loved so much those locations and lived for so long close to them. It's a matter of character. Some places, as some people, have more character than other.

I must say that here, while in US, I've never seen a funeral. I was in the States for almost one year and half. And I've always believed that the attitude towards death is fundamental in defining not only an individual, but, also, communities or nations. Because, death is essential for defining life, the way of dealing with death is the most important for what is specific on human beings. For Americans, death is something touched with extreme gentleness, decency and delicacy. Something to be covered, as much as possible, for the other's eyes. I saw American funerals in the movies. While in the East they keep elements from a Greek tragedy, a show made to shock the other, in the U.S. death, nevertheless just as present became intimate in it's deeper meaning: profound and a pre-text for life. It seems that people from Miami understood better than other, what a curious and strange Austrian philosopher, once, said: "Death is not a fact of life." It doesn't belong to life. But the orientation regarding death does, says all the time, Florida.

The Cable

In spite of the embarrassment of Margaret Mitchell's house, lonely among new buildings, Atlanta, still, from what I have seen, retained the flavour of the South. Or, of that South which I expected, taken from movies and books. Almost going with the wind is the house, of the writer, also. If you just imagine Scarlet O'Hara's grandiose house, from the movie, the author's house is more close to a hut. Nevertheless, the house is there, as in Thebes, remained, once, Pindar's House. The link between past and present, in her case, is better served by a side pavement sidewalk; where, in the downtown, her name is near other names like Ray Charles, Jimmy Carter, Ted Turner and Newt Gingrich. There is a certain pride of the people from Georgia, expressed by those written names; something like: "You, who are a pedestrian, you must know that our state gave big personalities to the world!". In fact Atlanta, more than other southern locations, seems to sustain that "The South will rise again". Somewhere, in the burnt fields and a wounded glance of poor people from the small locations of the South, you can feel this refrain.

Atlanta has something from the State's symbol: a peach. A kind of sweetness and gentleness in the sunshine and in the trees. Even the pretty small "Bed & Breakfast" from Sheridan Drive had in its lines something like

that. In the curves of the traditional bed and in the predominant colours of the rooms: blue-ciel and pink. The owner-an Indian, naturalized in England- was careful in offering, every morning, almost a "Victorian" breakfast.

For our group, one of the most important activities was the visit made at big companies. Thanks to such a long and diverse tour, we were in a position to see "H.B.

"Fuller Company" and "3 M" in St.Paul, "Honeywell Inc." in Minneapolis, "Boeing "and "Starbucks Coffee Co." in Seattle, "Denver International Airport" and "U.S. West" in Denver," Exxon Corporation" in Dallas," Chicago Mercantile Exchange"," Ford Motor Company" in Detroit, the "International Monetary Fund" in Washington, the "Federal Reserve Bank", "Morgan Stanley" in New York and some other.

More or less, those meetings were very much alike. Executives of the companies, a group of people in their fifties, with their names in front of them, waited for us in a room where a lunch was also prepared; mostly, it was sea food on ice, asparagus, fruits salad, coffee and juices. If not, despite coffee and juices always present, like conditioned air, were sandwiches. Usually, a younger woman, very correctly dressed in a black suit, who was in charge with the public relations, gave the first information about the company; numbers, diagrams, graphics, tactics and strategies. Invariable, a kind of top situated the

company in the first on the glob, U.S. or the state. The " top", easy to be found everywhere in American life, is one of the most efficient instruments for keeping a spirit of competition and fight inside the society. Whoever is out of a top, does not exist on American soil, from an elite point of view.

Then, the beautiful lady had to answer at the questions raised by us. While I found myself surprised to see how my friends were noting everything, they probably were surprised to find that I didn't write down, anything.

Each from the executives was then presented and invited to offer a different perspective about the company. Most of them gave me the impression, which could be wrong, that they have put all their life in the firm. The corporation took something from their faces, as the faces had something from the advertising done for the company.

After the coffee, the person, who in the hierarchy of that day was superior, was saying something like "As you know, in the US, there is not such a thing as a free lunch! Now it's your turn, to tell us your impressions about US, or your country."

Everybody had his or her own story, far better known by the other nine, than by himself or herself; so many times had it been told. The staff of executives was all the time agreeable and enjoyable, looking for a joke, even where there wasn't one at all. They were ready and prepared

for a good spirit, as, this was actually the only purpose of the meeting.

Finally, we made conversation with one of our hosts, closer to us.

"Cable News Network "or CNN, with "Coca-Cola" and "Delta" are those companies which give Atlanta the privilege to be in the top, among other cities, in the US and overseas. But while "Coca-Cola" is the "material face" of the American influence -a sweet one- CNN is part, together with Hollywood, from the spiritual "dominion." Because of CNN, Atlanta is one of four towns, which in the future globalisation, alone, will be able to rule the world; the other three are Washington with the White House, Pentagon and I.M.F., Los Angeles with Hollywood and New York with the Wall Street and the Federal Reserve Bank.

But CNN alone, even by mistake, cannot create events. In the "2000 American election" CNN, through Bernard Shaw, has announced to early the victory of George W. Bush. As long as CNN is the most important source for news all over, it can influence events everywhere, in a very short time. And sometimes, events become history. The difference between a fashion presentation and the presentation of a war, is, after all, not so important.

Or, it's a matter of presentation. "Wag the dog" was about something like that. In Romania, not to speak about United States, the "1989 Revolution", was a TV experiment, also. It's

effects over hysterical masses, were disastrous. People were delivered to death because whatever appeared on the TV had to be true. The TV took in those days religious proportions. It seems that not only elections were decided by TV, also, as happened at the most, already, classical debate between Kennedy and Nixon. Now, maybe, a revolution is not to be conceived without TV. Would have been the civic rights American movement possible, without the TV, just emerged in the American society after 1960. TV spread immediately "events" for all communities, unable to read newspapers and magazines.

Here the T.V. reveals one of it's most essential purposes, if we take a political and social point of view: it is and will be an instrument for masses, less cultivated and much easier to be motivated just using images, which are more accessible. Each image is "giving" an object, which in itself, it's more real than the word from a book, for example. Because people have always associated the lie with sentences and words, the manipulation through TV is more subtle, so, more immense.

Last year-2000- I had a friend from the States in Romania. She told me that while in America she wasn't interested in T.V, in my country she couldn't stop herself from losing five or six hours, daily, on CNN International. Larry King 's microphone is now on some Romanians tables, which are hosts for "talk shows".

I've had the opportunity to make a

comparison between CNN International and the "domestic" CNN. For me, the first is by far, more complete and complex. The last is, somehow, that refrain "What should we care about others problems?" Forgetting that, if you want to take responsibilities overseas, you cannot educate two hundred millions of Americans just with domestic concerns. Because, in time, you might be forced not to be able to resolve just the domestic issues, for the very reason that "domestic", would have no meaning without "international".

The first time when I watched American TV, I was confused. The rhythm and the succession of information were so rapid, that European TV, by comparison, seemed lazy and sleepy, but more peaceful. A movie for Americans becomes a real torture: there is so much advertising, delivered every three minutes, that after four hours, from which just two are for the movie, you have your head full with rugs, jewels and farm products. This "alert" style, day by day, is inducing in souls a frame of mind for a kind of hunted human beings, characterised by panic and consternation. Those all, supplemented with TV series for feeling good, are creating a superficial imaginary life, where the human state is divorced from the real existence. I remember what huge efforts a T.V intellectual, from Chicago, has done for implementing a non-commercial TV Channel. There was possible to see art movies or to listen to Vivaldi, without

being interrupted by advertising. For that he was desperately making appeals to subscriptions and donations. "Another" kind of TV was offered by very personal attempts like those "talk shows" done by John Ross, late in the night, or, Ted Koppel. Nobody knows anything about them in Romania, where the situation is more and more the same: Jay Leno, David Latermann and Oprah have, already, their Romanian replicas. And there are many South American soap operas, in vogue for Ceausecu's ex-working class.

Often, I was thinking that the power of the TV must rest in more than just simple entertaining. It should be something different than the tiredness after the job. Such a magnetism may have a religious explanation, with roots in what is fundamental in the human being: the Fear of remaining alone with yourself and big questions and real certainties: years which are going, the biological decline, the balance of accomplishments, death. Something bad happened to you but, fortunately, at 4 p.m. Al Bundy "Married with children" is on. In this perspective, the TV replaces drogues and alcohol, which sometimes make the life more supportable for weak individuals. As for strong human beings, those issues are transferred in politics, public life, money, art, family and a good wedlock. It's interesting that powerful personalities are watching less TV: because they are in action, becoming news for the other, they make the others follow them and to lose their

time, money and life. All those three are, in a subtle process, transferred to the stronger: people who don't watch TV. Strong people consider themselves, by essence, lonely people. That's how and why the T.V .is becoming the instrument for the masses. Like football... American or European.

"Cable is, still, TV!" This was a replica from a play that we've seen in Chicago. Maybe... Fact is that the building from One CNN Plaza at 100 International Blvd. was impressive. It would be childish just to describe it.

After a media tour, with an overview of CNN, we have assisted to the presentation of CNN's new CD-ROM, where we spoke about the Internet. In that moment, as every other journalist from the US, representatives from CNN were also concerned about it's effects, trying to adapt themselves to it.

Indeed, without knowing too much about "Internet", which is now in vogue in Romania, I think, it will be the most serious competitor for the supremacy of the press. The "Internet" is taking back humanity from the mirage of image and concreteness, to the pure space of words and abstractions. In that place, where, after John's Gospel, the entire world and the essence of the human being, begun with a Word.

The Sound

For me, Tennessee and Nashville were related with a hero, from a movie seen under the communist regime: "The Sheriff from Tennessee". His name was Bufort Pusser and he fought against criminal organisations, illegal gambling and alcohol. Still, I remember the main melodic line of the movie and a replica given to Bufort by a bandit "I just try to give to people what they want and make them feel better". The sheriff dies in the end in an arranged car accident. His profile was poetic, generous and noble.

Maybe, thanks to my age then-when I was a child -or because on TV there were rarely good films -those moments had something miraculous. As some old Americans are remembering with nostalgia hard times from the 1929-1933; once a week, when I went to the Cinema to see Bufort, I was the happiest. And not only me, because for such a movie there were long lines, where you had to wait three or four hours.

Every American region offered to the States something unique. And through the States, to the world. Tennessee gave the Americans, great whisky, a great president and a great sound. At 4 Music Square East the tour included RCA Studio B, the oldest recording studio in Nashville, "the place where the Nashville sound got started". Beginnings, always, whether the beginning of a love or the birth of a belief, have something mysterious. Those small rooms, quite

common, have assisted the beginning of a new feeling, afterwards copied, everywhere. The earth of the mythical South and the electronic technique of the North became engaged.

Elvis was everywhere. Objects which had belonged to him and showed that he had been famous, money, extravagant, and not always, a good taste. Not only gold everywhere, but also even his car, enormous and gaudy. I was a child when he was in the last years of his life. As I saw him then, performing, he was worshipped like a God, he had the voice of a God and his behaviour was of somebody who knew that; in spite of the fact, that he had fallen cheeks, huge rings and huge side-whiskers.

Amy Kurland, the owner of "The Bluebird Cafe" from Nashville was typical for the American mentality, where university studies are nothing if you cannot transform them in money and success. She was a graduate of George Washington University in DC with a double major in American Literature and Studies. The Bluebird Cafe offered the opportunity for somebody eager to begin a career in new country and acoustic music. The customers had to consume, at least, \$7.

The Challenge

Louisville was, at the end of August, as depressing as Kentucky. In our van, passing just

burnt fields with cotton, everybody was sleepy. When we stooped for gas at a modest station, it took me some time, when I for asked a hamburger, to understand the local dialect.

The town was wild, in a small rain and a cold wind. On North Fourth Avenue, quite narrow, where "Galt House East" was, I hadn't seen anybody. Because of the weather. But, also, it was Saturday. Fact is, despite that avenue, if you go on other empty streets, not much from downtown remains.

Together with my friends I found, not far from the hotel, along the river, a place for making pictures. Near a famous iron bridge, a bronze inscription specified that the bridge had been visited by Tocqueville and Mark Twain. We spoke there about families, our countries and plans for future. We hadn't done it before, without being asked after having been offered a free lunch. The US might be the moment of truth, or a turning point in life: it must have been like that for each possible émigré who has seen himself or herself on American soil. In that moment, looking at the waves of the river, one of us said "My wife is here, and my children. But even without them, I can better help my mother, sending money home, for keeping her small business. I'll stay here". "That's not an entirely bad country, but where I live, I have a good apartment, a good car, a good salary, a good beer, I can travel...To take everything from the beginning, here, I'm to old and it's not for me".

"So different seem to be a lot of things here, that, sometimes, I miss my problems from home. I'm scared about becoming too bored. "The latter knew that he would go back for old things and for whatever was still obsolete in Europe. The small rain from Louisville and its empty streets might have deepened that, because that very night he called his wife.

With few exceptions, technology brought more sadness for the towns from South. There is something that makes new buildings not too suitable there.

Yet, Louisville was inspired enough, because it gave birth to the most "romantic" boxer that we know: Muhammad Ali. There is a boulevard in the town with his name.

When I was watching, as all Romanians, the confrontation between Muhammad Ali and Joe Fraser, everybody wanted, the first to win. Not only because he was younger. He was the "challenger". For Americans that term means a lot. Every American was once a "challenger". Well, every human being is a "challenger". The difference at Americans is that it became like a war cry. It took noble and honourable meanings: despite the money you have or social status, this is a calling in accepting new situations of life and new competitions; that keeps their spirit and life itself, young. A European is stupefied hearing Americans claiming that "life begins after 60 years". When many Romanians are thinking and waiting for retirement and death, Americans are

looking around for new provocations. There is ambition, but a noble one. I've heard about a president from a very prestigious university who has resigned, just because he wanted to take a new challenge. That means, also, to refuse to mortify yourself, while you can still fight.

The best result of the "challenge" and its philosophy is the winner; the worst, "the loser". The "loser" is situating an American at the edge of American society. The black Wall of Vietnam Memorial and its 50.000 Americans lost is nothing, but the echo of three American presidents, who said or believed something like: "I don't want to be the first American president who has lost a war!" From the president until the last American, everything is acceptable and understandable under the sun, but not to lose. From some movies you might believe that it is better to rob a bank, than to be a loser. The spectrum of the "loser" is beyond every American's destiny and society, as a whole. That makes Americans competitive overseas. In their country, it is the nightmare, which makes the difference between people, the hierarchy and crystallises the value of inequality.

The Doubt

Such a vast country is an adventure, not only in space, but in time, also. I am not thinking of museums even if, for the country of the

technological genius, "Henry Ford Museum" and "Greenfield Village" are the most representative museums. A masterpiece about Americans who, through "The Spirit of Saint-Louis", the Moon-Vehicle and J.F.K's car from Dallas, made hits and history. Yet, museums and museums.

Amish Country tells a different story, which with stubbornness declines Henry Ford's-and with him America's -alternative of history. Being history themselves, but at it's beginnings, the Amish Community is at the opposite of the "Greenfield Village". An island surrounded by the Internet, fax, credit cards and cables, the Amish country has the vanity of rejecting globalisation, as devil's expression, fighting with pumpkin gem and handmade pillows.

Of course the battle is lost from the beginning, as any other attempt of "coming back to the nature".

Pilgrims having arrived in America must have looked like some people who I've seen in Intercourse, Pennsylvania. High statures, big bones and that beard a la Lincoln, which takes your mind to a kind of preachers or prophets. Women, with their black and white suits, have something from Gauguin's arlesian portraits. Their shops are a celebration, in gold and blue, of the autumn; perfumes of the leafs, flowers, herbs and dry fruits are everywhere. As, small wooden objects painted in blue. Any kind of naturist food is to be found and like jewels, jars with different kinds of honey, gem and mushrooms.

An Amish house is a return to the 18th century. Almost everything is homemade and an Amish woman sewing, forgotten in a corner, will try to sell to visitors all the years of her reveries. The most abstruse link that connects Amish with other Americans is the money. Amish in charge with the commerce, usually, sell at high prices. They did not, entirely, escape from industry, because the industry of the film, of course, arrived there. Near a cluster of pumpkins, every guide will show a call box, famous already: Harrison Ford had given a call from there, in a detective movie about the Amish.

The dinner that we had at the home of the Amish couple, Leroy and Ruth Esh, reminded to me of that lost milieu of my grandparents. At sunset they came from the work of the land, probably, one of the most noble and honourable works. My grandfather, before eating, while the milk was on fire and the corn mush almost done, always was reading from the Bible, with a low voice. He liked the story about the rich man and the poor Lazarus. After finishing it, with a light of satisfaction in his eyes, he began to eat, crushing, first, the corn mush in the milk with his spoon. My grandmother, busy with cooking, had time just for a small cross made with her hand, where the heart is.

At Leroy's table, the light, which came from, the gas flame and his blessing gave to our group the strangeness of an original Christian group. He knew everything about the historical

and cultural background of the Protestantism. Subtle dogma issues, Bible's 17th century editions and an old German dialect. But the most expressive were the knotty hands of the Esh's family, which in that light, in contrast with the blue of their shirts, took the colour of the earth. Looking in their children's eyes I was asking myself "Do they have any doubt about the path in life, the tradition has selected for them? When they are so close to the miracle of technology?

The Rendezvous

Coming on the highway, from Pennsylvania, to Washington D.C., there is not too much to be seen. And if Pennsylvania is gifted with gorgeous landscapes, the closer you are to the capital of the country, the more common are the environments. Two lanes of road, limited by bushes and trees.

A surprise would be to approach Washington on the railway, from the same Pennsylvania.

I did that three years later, with "Amtrak", when, starting from Chicago, I made a trip with my family, on the East Coast. Just an hour far from Washington, there is an image of disorder and dereliction, unexpected for a spot with the ambition of bringing everywhere in the world prosperity. Shanty ramshackle houses, old broken cars, lumber rooms and dresses on wires. Almost

nobody near houses.

The "Union Station" makes the entrance for greatness. Where I supposed that was a station, I've found a kind of cathedral, not smaller than Hagia Sofia from Istanbul.

Not far from the station, somewhere on the left, the Cupola of the Capitol Building opens the sacramental part of the town. While in Antique Rome the founders of the Imperial Rome, Caesar and Augustus, had their temples as Gods in Forum, here, Jefferson and Lincoln have temples, too; the difference is just in name, because those are called "Memorials": a compromise done for more liberal times. In the evening when the light is coming from inside, being reflected in the lake or in the Potomac River, the sensation of the supernatural is increased. Late in the night, flags which go round to the "Washington Obelisk", in the wind, like flames, crush the spectator under theirs convulsion and mute music.

In the spring, going along the Potomac, passing the "Jefferson Memorial" and the "Roosevelt Memorial" until the "Lincoln Memorial", must be a relish. Then, the cherry trees, received as a gift from Japan, planted on that route, are all with flowers. I understood that from the White House, there is a passage done in the trees, just for a view, until the "Jefferson Memorial". The statuary complex done in bronze for F.D.R. is in accord with his spirit. Despite the challenges faced by him, he was never rigid and had never

lost a kind of humour. The greatest American president appears with a small dog. A long line of statues represents poor people from the years of depression. Somewhere, a sentence from him, which is the essence of what he was, because he shaped fundamentally the 20th century: "We have a Rendezvous with the history". Thomas Mann describes, in the end of his book "Doctor Faustus", the sensation of relief felt, even by some Americans, when they had heard about F.D.R.'s death. He was far too strong for a system, where nobody should be too strong.

I was excited, in my first days spent in Washington, by the fact that all the public museums have a free entrance. From all others towns or capitals of the countries that I had seen, I met such a wise policy only in the capital of the U.S.A. Yet, important towns from the United States have one day on week, free entrance. For example, at Chicago Institute of Art, that day was Tuesday. Every American museum is a temptation, difficult to be refused; what the American continent has experienced through the diversity of émigrés, those museums are accomplishing with Time. No matter if it is Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, New York or Washington. Each art museum has an Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Roman, African, European and American section. The National Gallery of Art from Washington has hundreds of paintings, if we take in consideration just the painting. Some of them, the most important for

art or history. For example, there is one of the best Rembrandt's self-portraits, if not the most important: light, focused just on face and hands, makes the concentration of soul, spirit and interior life intense, almost unbearable. Napoleons portrait, made by Louis David, which became, all over, the way the Emperor is known-in his colonel of the Guard suit, with one hand near Plutarch's "Parallel Lives". While, here you need only the energy to see as much as possible, a private collection as "Phillips Collection", from the same Washington D.C., which contains no more than one hundred impressionist and postimpressionist paintings, would charge \$ 7 or 8.

Washington has something unexpected for such an "official " town: parts where it's intimate and private. On Wyoming Avenue there are small French or Italian restaurants, where tables are outside, with trees and flowers, or cafes full with young people. Nobody seems to be concerned with politics at those tables and no one is in hurry.

The House

"A house, nothing more than a house! In our town there are houses bigger than the White House. But you know, there are people from security, as you see in the movies. Very exciting". A friend, who visited the White House, before I did, told me that.

You may be disappointed if you come from Romania, where Ceausescu's "House of the People", as a volume, is the second in the world, after the Pentagon. Designed as an Irish house, it must have looked quite common. Jefferson's genius, projected those columns that support the Greek structure, seen from "Pennsylvania Avenue", which gives the entire personality to the White House. Behind, the face which looks to the "Washington Obelisk" receives its individuality from a structure done, if I understood well, under Truman, where, probably, the Oval Office is.

Inside, some rooms and drawing rooms represent the ground floor, open to the public. They give the impression of some dusty 18th century Anglo-Saxon rooms. A museum, even if one first lady or another tried to change that. Time is marked by president's portraits, everywhere. Some square centimetres on the White House walls mean years of world history. Probably, the most expensive surface in the world. Among them, the most "different", the least "official", the most poetic is Kennedy's portrait. Young, with his arms knitted and looking down. In Oliver Stone's movie, the key of the film is done with this portrait; when Nixon looking intensely to it, says, "When Americans are looking at you, they see what they would like to be. Looking at me, they see what they are".

The paradox and magic of the White House lays in the fact that even if it was intended

to have small proportions, for not having the attributes of royalty from Europe, it became the symbol of the world power.

In the White House we covered a press briefing, done by Vice President Al Gore and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. I have seen the press conference room, before, like everybody, on T.V. Now it seemed to me incredibly small, with its iron chairs, where a fat person would hardly find room. Bruce Babbitt was as temperamental, as a politician can be. He was furious on republicans, whom he accused as being like "money changers in the temple". He didn't try to be better than he was, or to "sell" a pose. Maybe that's why, I liked him. Al Gore was a different story. Faultless dressed, he was the entire time equal with himself. He answered to questions polite, but laconic and just what it was necessary. Without any colour, like a correct robot. So perfectly shaved, that I was asking myself how does he manage this. From his entire attitude, came out a kind of distance that made him a worse communicator than Bill Clinton was. Still, on the field of politics, Americans are the best speakers. A result of the fact that from small ages, Americans have the exercise of speaking on different occasions. The rhetoric is cultivated at all levels and it's a demand for social integration or social status.

This is a classical heritage, better applied than Europeans or other nations.

On the other hand, when you meet

American politicians, it's difficult not to notice that they are, still, superior, to Europeans, for example. One possible explanation could be the fact that even with a hard competition among Americans for acceding to the top, the base for selection is the largest. Everybody with talent can enter in the race for a local or national level. The real difficulty comes after; money is important, but not enough. This process of competing all the time, from the bottom until the top, finally gives a big probability for the selection of a real elite. To speak only about my country, it's almost impossible just to enter in the race. Those who are already there have closed the circle within political parties. The competition is, merely, among the same people and some political analysts.

Thanks to a bad electoral law, politics is like a sport game where you are allowed to watch or to speak with your family but not to enter in the game

The large base of selection for American politicians combined with the competition has given the time itself to the U.S.A., where elite is authentic. Bill Clinton understood very well that, delivering his last "State of the Union", in the year 2000, with a sentence like "This is our time!" That has been recognised by every U.S. president since Theodore Roosevelt, in spite of the feeling sustained, again and again, proudly, by the majority of Americans, that they should not care about overseas problems, having so

many domestic issues to deal with. Finally, trying to find what political Americanism could be, whether you like it or not, you make an attempt to define yourself.

The Wall

Not far from the " Lincoln Memorial ", are small kiosks with hot dogs, for the same \$ 2,50 and veterans selling medals or other souvenirs from the Korean and Vietnam War. Just as close is the "Vietnam Wall". Seeing people gathering there at the sunset, with small candles or with a paper for copying a name, you find what a "cancer" this war must have been for Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.

In the same "monumental Washington", going to the National Cathedral, somewhere on the right, you find even a mosque, where you have to put your shoes out. On that avenue, where most of the embassies are, the statue of Winston Churchill is giving a cordial salute. Washington is lucky to find itself on that casual scale, also.

The Fear

In that area we've interviewed William Colby, Director of the CIA under President Jimmy Carter. It's understandable what a

"journalist" appearance William Colby was. It might be not the case with western traditional democracies, but it is known that in East Europe, the communist party had all the power and, within it, the secret service was its essence. Whoever controlled the secret service, controlled the secretariat and the bureaucracy of the party. The 20th century belonged to Services in charge with the Big Unknown Fear- the mysterious human zone where the power of a secret service lays.

William Colby's house from Dent Place was a disappointment at what, probably, ten journalists have expected from such an ex-powerful personage. It looked old and dusty. Torrid and full of moisture at the same time. If I remember well, he was surrounded by cats and while he answered to some questions, he was keeping a cat in hem.

At that time he was an international consultant for corporations, governments and investments organisations but, of course, he spoke about his period as the CIA Director. He considered his term as the moment when CIA supported a kind of "glasnost" and "perestroika"; when CIA came under the control of the U.S. Congress. When it was "democratised" and "liberalised", if that is not a contradiction in terms, for something that by essence, is hermetic. We should not forget, that to some extents, this was the "American spirit of time" after Nixon's hard involvement in Allende's troubles and South

America's problems. On the other hand, a possible evaluation of Colby's accomplishments, should not avoid that Carter's years, which coincided with Brejnev's rule, had marked a peak for Soviet Union's offensive and an escalation of Russian imperial ambitions. It seems, he respected the force of the other superpower's secret service. He made a joke about the difference between Americans and Russians: "Russia's national game is chess, while ours is poker". If so, than finally, poker defeated chess.

I was in Romania, when later, I heard on T.V. that William Colby was found drowned, while canoeing in the Potomac waters or in a lake nearby.

The Priest

Deputy Managing Director, Stanley Fischer, from the International Monetary Fund was in charge. In 2001 he was, I think, still there, probably on a better position in the hierarchy of the I.M.F. Because, he belonged to that rare category of people, who contrary to the majority of the other, have to hide the immense power, they possess. Thanks to that power, "the universal money", he was able to transcend regimes, communist, capitalist or nationalist, times and changes; mainly, for he was the change, itself. Sometimes he seemed to be amused about some of our questions. From his

point of view, many of them must have been naive.

Bankers are in the U.S.A., more than in other countries, priests of the abstraction -money- which became the expression of the modern human being. I've found in a magazine that a human life has a medium cost of \$ 120,000. More or less. Stanley Fischer knows that on a global scale, if a life has a cost, then everything has a cost. This is the spirit of the modern time and whatever or whoever is out of the cost is out of the I.M.F and so out of his time. When the I.M.F. refuses to give money to a country or institution, this has the value of a contemporary Catholic "excommunication".

The Neighbourhood

When about weapons, you may think that the first and main purpose of a gun is to kill or to wound." Otherwise, a gun would be useless. To defend is devolving from the first purpose; it's secondary and possible, only thanks to the first intention. All those suggest that is in the essence of a gun, not to avoid, but to bring death. It's a kind of temptation which can make things irreversible, just because it is there," at the wrong place, in the wrong moment". One of all those children, who, from 1995 until today, have terrorised the United States opening fire in public schools, a few years later, with another mind,

probably would have acted in other manner. The difference is an accessible weapon.

For a visit at the "National Rifle Association" we had to go in Fairfax, Virginia, following Waples Mill Road. The staff which we met there was the nicest in the world. More than that, they really believed in the necessity of their association. They saw themselves as the "cornerstone" of the "Americanism", the expression of American constitution and American freedom. The weapon was the guarantee of the individual, against the state involvement in everybody's life. And while the democrats subscribe for a stronger state, the members of the "N.R.A." are advocates of the republican philosophy. Those issues and the debate around them are widely known.

If the crimes from the U.S. schools will continue, probably, the legislation will be changed. As for now, if Americans are not scared by the state, they are, thanks to the "cornerstone", scared by the "other"; on a street, in a bus or a restaurant, an abrupt gesture would put all the other in a state of alarm. For such a situation, who has money, chooses a good neighbourhood: the selection of the neighbourhood has became more important than the selection of the house and the indicator of the social status. Who doesn't have money, buys a gun.

The Bazaar

"Just wait until New York!" or "You haven't seen New York, yet!" was the remark made by Americans, when noticing that, usually, the majority of them, try to be polite. In all the meanings, this is the most eastern spot of the U.S.A. Here you are in the Near East, if not in the Balkans. That strikes you at the very first moment when you are going out from the Grand Central Station, in the street. In the train, looking, as everybody does, at other people's faces, it's impossible to imagine what will be. As for the Grand Central Station, the scene from "North by Northwest" was much too impressive, for thinking at something else. The road, also, doesn't prepare the visitor in an appropriate way. Coming from New England, you see an uninhabited desert and, far away, something like a torrid fortress.

Those immigrants who came from Europe passing the ocean, I guess, were fortunate. The modern sensibility, already prepared by movies and stories, the salty breeze, the Manhattan playing before eyes and the Statue of Liberty arising when the hot mist vanishes, must have produced a touching and grandiose show in souls. From what I've seen, New York has something from Istanbul or Bucharest. The same disorder and hurried people wherever you look. Garbage near a Rolls Royce. Fancily dressed people eating in the street kebabs and pickles. Bad taste in

electric lights making advertising on Broadway and the French, too obviously looked for, style from the Fifth Avenue. "David Latermann Show" and "The Metropolitan Museum of Art" with its Middle Age diners and intimate baroque concerts performed at one candle. Small booths from "Amsterdam Street" and the "Strawberry Field" Corner from the Central Park. Yellow cabs and the "underground" life from the ruffled subway. Everything is for sale and negotiable. What you may find in a place with a price, it is possible to find nearby at half of that price. Buying it's a way of being. I couldn't recognise one of my fellows covered with everything he took, of course, at a "good price": glasses, a watch, a camera and a leather jacket. The next day, he was to find the camera at a much lower price in the Grand Central Station. So much gold and jewels, I have seen only in the Covered Bazaar from Istanbul. China Town is full of silver and hundreds of vessels. So many sausages as in Little Italian, winded near bunches of red peppers, I've seen nowhere. Restaurants, like shops, are open until late, late in the night. Early in the morning, fruits and juices are back in the street, along with ice.

The Time

Everybody is either performing or busy. Performing is somebody at the beginning of a career. In the streets there are, from place to place, groups that are singing or dancing.

In 1998, after three years, I found, at the long line, waiting for the Ferry to The Statue of Liberty, the same team from 1995, making gymnastics and acrobatics. After the show, one of them came, at the line of people, with a hat, for money. Those already having success in New York should be busy. They have never time for you or patience, because time is working for them. Probably, the most aggressive, but also, the most important in New York, they have created for the town the fame of being rude.

As compensation, for such avarice with the time, New York is offering, to the visitor, a square; it became the very essence of the town, where timing is everything: the Times Square. That square, maybe for the same reasons is the modern symbol of the passing of years: there is no New Year, wherever in the world, not to present on T.V., seconds being numbered there. For other parts of the year in New York it's enough to go there at 10 in the night, to lose yourself in thousands of people shopping, to understand why Lady Diana and John Lennon loved this town, so much. Where else could you find more vigour? Where else could you feel more alive?

There is another way of considering this town the core of the time and space...If we convert time in money and money in time, as after New Yorkers everybody on the planet does, a visit at the "Federal Reserve Bank" is more than relevant. An evaluation made for journalists

asserts "More gold is stored in this bank than anywhere else in the world". Indeed, so much gold means so much time, again. The "1929 Depression" proved it, because it began, for the whole world, in New York.

When in New York, just travelling, in a kind of space or time, you may escape from its ever-present forceful spirit. In space, the best would be, somewhere, not very far from New York: in Chappaqua, for example at "Reader's Digest". The place is so close to New York and, yet, so far. The "Reader's Digest" headquarter is like a European nobility's house. Almost a palace, surrounded by parks, deep in the nature. No neighbours, no hurried people, and time. Inside, sculpted bookshelves, old books and old furniture. On the walls, as, almost in every corner, original paintings by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Modigliani.

The travel in time is facilitated by museums. New York has plenty of them, so you have to be careful when you make a choice. For example, "The Museum of Modern Art" is not only the most "New York", but also, also, most "American". In a perfect agreement with a country which wanted to escape from traditions and history, for taking everything from the beginning, in U.S. the preference in art is going, towards modernism and post-modernism. For what is new and an experiment in expression. Otherwise, we cannot understand why in American museums there are, maybe, more

impressionist and postimpressionist works than in Europe. Americans with money, at the end of 19th century, must have found something from themselves in Monet, Renoir, Cézanne and Degas, since they brought so many homes. And if museums are not relevant for this spirit, where, we may assume that mostly the elite is going, than the fact that every common American has in his house a post-modern poster, is pertinent enough.

The Bostonians

I was fortunate to arrive in New England in late September. It's true; the high style of the region is announced, on the road, by the Saxon stately walls of Yale University. The landscapes of Connecticut, themselves, are already an introduction to that combination made by the English red, gold and the intense green of the leafs. The leafs represent the primordial element of New England, where, most of the houses and those small churches, from small places, are painted, invariably in white. The lines of the hills are not as spectacular as the contrasts from the North of California. Nevertheless, in the lines of Massachusetts there is something sweet and pacific, which makes you forget for a while, that you are in the trepidating America.

At its historical tumult, Boston is surprisingly private. On Newbury Street, flowers

were given at every corner. In that period of the year, or every time, in Boston, or in America, the sunflowers were the passion. As, the most worn colour was black. Almost all of the lovers passing, hand in hand, on that street have had long black leather jackets. Nights, of course, were more romantic. Music was heard, every night, not far from our hotel. I still remember what a perfect background, Phill Collin's "When I'm feeling blue" was.

It took me an afternoon to walk until Cambridge, following an avenue and passing a big bridge, close to the downtown. The street, as some parts of the Harvard University were quite squalid. Probably, the expectations for the most famous, overseas, still, American university, were too elevated. The spirit doesn't match too much the appearance. Fact is, the University of Chicago, or, just an American college, as Macalester, looked different. The compensation, in Cambridge, comes from "Fogg Art Museum" where a Renaissance architectural interior, makes a strange contrast with Van Gogh's painted boots and his self-portrait dedicated "A mon ami Paul Gauguin".

A mistake would be to look for the spirit of New England in Boston. I was searching for it in vane downtown. The modern America is there, dressed in black leather jackets on motorcycles. But Henry James and even Sylvia Plath are to be found near Ralph Waldo Emerson, at the "Concord Museum". The "Orchard House", home

of Louisa May Alcott and the "Old Manse", home of Ralph Waldo Emerson are, in their way, a story about the old New England. Old pictures, old tables, old silver candlesticks, an old Cemetery and a scratch done, once, on a window, bring to the visitor the melancholy and the stuffy feelings of other times. It's easy to imagine the famous lodgers of those houses, staying, all day long, to look from a window at a small rain. Taking then, with them in the Cemetery, subtle feelings and tortuous love stories, ever to be guessed.

A part of the landscape is the wooden small North Bridge" where the American Revolution started". I have a picture, with all my fellows, on the bridge. Hard to believe that this was the historical beginning of the civilisation that placed it's flag on the Moon.

As, at Plymouth it's hard to imagine pilgrims passing the ocean on such a small ship. "Mayflower" is contradicting brutally the imagination with it's size...It is a confirmation about the great achievements generated by a strong believe. Which is able not only to remove mountains, but to pass oceans, also. Actors on "Mayflower", dressed as at the beginning of the 17th century, are using the dialect of that period. Each of them has the story of one original personage who had travel, doing on the ship the same job. One asked me, where was I from. When I said Romania, he looked confused at me and very serious. He gave me, implicit, a lesson

of history. In that period, Romanians lived in three other small states. There was no Romania, as a state, yet. My county and my town belonged to Transylvania. Of course, he knew everything about that Transylvania; even about the prince who was in charge then. Maybe, I would have preferred the ship, with no actors on it...Just with the ocean and the sky, as it must have been from the moment they left Europe. In this way it's easier to dream about glory, calling and belief.

Despite history, Plymouth has something else to be proud of. A complete entrance in Plymouth character requires a visit to its restaurants. They have class and charm because they are simple and genuine, but, despite all, they have fresh lobsters and swordfish.

From New England's intelligence, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, we've had a meeting with Prof. Noam Chomsky. He was once called by The New York Times" the most important intellectual alive". What I can assert is that with 12 years before this meeting, at my faculty, there was no psychology studies or philosophy of knowledge, without Noam Chomsky. He is known mostly as a linguist who has created the standard theory of how children learn language. He was a small man, but who gave the impression of somebody with a feverish activity of mind. Now was the first time that I have perceived him as a critic of society. First he has surprised some of us, saying that it is a big mistake to compare South-American countries

with those from East-Europe, a comparison often used. From his point of view, the degree of poverty was more profound in South America.

Important in his statement was his belief-a life conclusion maybe, that an intellectual should always oppose the state's power. An intellectual's purpose is to be a critic of state's structures without regard of the political colours. For such a position, Noam Chomsky is representative for the American brains, who, from Roosevelt until today, were mostly for the political American left. They were great admirers of Kennedy, who used a lot of New England intellectuals in his administration. They made hard days to Nixon and Reagan. It's not an exaggeration to admit that, with the exception of McCarthy's time, they have influenced, from "outside ", and from the opposite direction, the American politics. In part, they are responsible for all the struggles, which kneaded the sixties and the seventies years of the American society.

We finished our "Massachusetts Program" with a weekend spend in the "splendid isolation "of Cape Cod. Not very far from Kennedy's summer residence on the seashore of the Atlantic Ocean. Our host family was Pat and Bob Syvanen. Bob was an artist who worked in different materials. I met first Pat in Romania, in my town, where she came with a group of Americans in 1994. She liked Romania and when hearing about the Programme. she, together with other families from Brewster, took the initiative

of being our hosts. Her house is huge but, nevertheless, an old thing, where you lose yourself among any kind of useful and useless objects. The most interesting of all, where the Syvanens themselves: representatives for that category of Americans, free of any possible condition, who, for sure, do not have to many things to regret looking back at their life. Two years later, they left the house and went in Florida at St.Petersburg. Once, they wanted to sell the house, to buy a boat and to go, from place to place, on the East Coast of the U.S.A., and even further. Now, they would like to leave for a long trip in Europe. As, for that moment, there was no morning, not to take their granddaughter to the Ocean, for swimming. When I had arrived, they were just going to a wedding- party and told me "Go, wherever you want in the house, watch T.V., do what you want. You'll find something in the fridge. You'll manage in a way". In the fridge was a big piece of sea bass and nothing else. It took me a while to prepare it, until being able to eat.

Unique for Cape Code, was the absence of tourism, people, crowded places, McDonalds and that entire staff, known as "Disney Culture" which makes many American spots to be the same, no matter where you are. The Syvanens knew a beach with fine sand, where there was nobody, for most of the time. To be there, isolated, just with sand, waters and sky, is a privilege and the best preparation for facing

again the Americanism and it's urban essence.

To understand better New York, which is the "time" itself, you need to go, for a while, out of the time, in Cape Code.

The End

Sometimes, speaking or writing small things about a feeling, you may diminish it. It dies, little by little. I couldn't find myself in articles about America, which is a kind of feeling. Less than a journalist, I was, maybe, more, just wandering.